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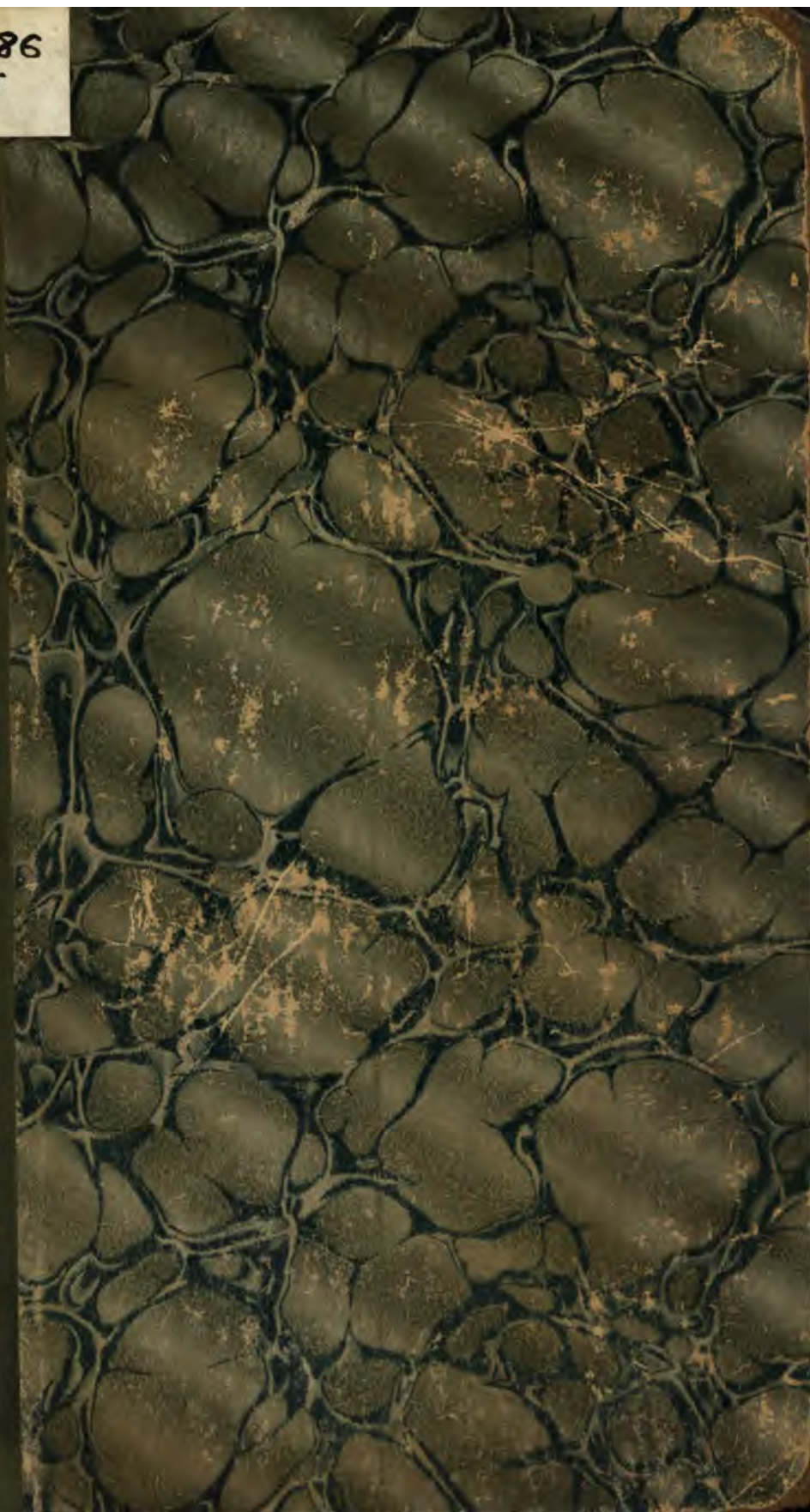
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*Rev. John Bell*

*with Mr. Arthur's kind regards*

AN

ESSAY

ON THE

CHARACTER OF MACBETH.

*Quoted* "Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:  
The genius and the mortal instruments  
Are then in council; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection."

JULIUS CÆSAR.

*Act II  
Scene*

LONDON:

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## PREFACE.

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THE following Essay is a reply to an article which appeared, some time ago, in the "Westminster Review"\* on the character of Macbeth. The Author of the present pamphlet does not consider the time that has elapsed since the appearance of that article as of any importance in affecting the value—such as it may be—of the observations which he now offers in reply to the arguments of the Westminster Reviewer; seeing that it is no topic of a merely ephemeral nature, which forms the subject of the following pages, but one of which the interest must continue so

\* Vol. 41.



long as Time endures,—so long as there are minds and hearts to appreciate and to thrill at the conceptions of him who was, at once, the mightiest of Dramatists,—the profoundest of Philosophers,—and the most sublime of Poets.

*London, April, 1846.*

AN ESSAY

ON THE

CHARACTER OF MACBETH.

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A WRITER in the Westminster Review, in an article on Macbeth, draws some very striking and original conclusions, of which, perhaps, the most startling, as it is decidedly the most novel, is his discovery that the character of the chief personage of the Drama has been constantly misrepresented on the stage. The reviewer regards the personations of Macbeth by Garrick, Kemble, Kean, and Macready as being entirely opposed to Shakspeare's conception of the character, while the recorded opinions of

a Siddons on the subject he considers to be erroneous.

The following passages, which are quoted by the reviewer for the purpose of exposing their fallacy, are from a pamphlet by Mr. Thomas Whately.

“The first thought of succeeding to the Throne is suggested, and success in the attempt is promised, to Macbeth by the Witches : he is therefore represented as a man whose natural temper would have deterred him from such a design, if he had not been immediately tempted and strongly impelled to it. Agreeably to these ideas, Macbeth appears to be a man not destitute of the feelings of humanity. His lady gives him that character :

‘ I fear thy nature ;

It is too full o’ the milk of human kindness,

To catch the nearest way.’

which apprehension was well founded ; for his reluctance to commit the murder is owing, in a great measure, to reflections which arise from sensibility. . . .

“A man of such a disposition will esteem, as they ought to be esteemed, all gentle and amiable qualities in another ; and therefore Macbeth is affected by the mild virtues of Duncan, and reveres them in his Sovereign when he stifles them in himself.” “One who has these feelings,” Mr.

Whately remarks subsequently, "though he may have no principles, cannot easily be induced to commit a murder. The intervention of a supernatural cause accounts for his acting so contrary to his disposition. But that alone is not sufficient to prevail entirely over his nature; the instigations of his wife are also necessary to keep him to his purpose."

We should not say, as Mr. Whately does, that Macbeth acted *contrary to his disposition*. There must, necessarily, have been a strong tendency to evil in his nature, or he would have successfully resisted the temptations to which he was exposed.

The following remarks, which are also quoted by the reviewer, are Mrs. Siddons's observations upon Macbeth's character :

"On the arrival of the amiable Monarch who had so honoured him of late, his naturally benevolent and good feelings resume their wonted power. He then solemnly communes with his heart, and after much powerful reasoning upon the danger of the undertaking, calling to mind that Duncan his King, of the mildest virtues, and his Kinsman, lay as his guest, — all those accumulated determents, with the violated rights of sacred hospitality bringing up the rear, rising all at once in terrible array to his awakened conscience, he relinquishes the atrocious purpose, and wisely determines

to proceed no further in the business. But now, behold, his evil genius, his grave-charm, appears; and by the force of her revilings, her contemptuous taunts, and, above all, by her opprobrious aspersion of cowardice, chases the gathering drops of humanity from his eyes, and drives before her impetuous and destructive career all those kindly charities, those impressions of loyalty, and pity, and gratitude, which, but the moment before, had taken full possession of his mind. She makes her very virtues the means of a taunt to her lord :

—‘ you have the milk of human kindness in your heart,’ she says (in substance) to him, ‘ but ambition, which is my ruling passion, would also be yours if you had courage. With a hankering desire to suppress, if you could, all your weaknesses of sympathy, you are too cowardly to will the deed, and can only dare to wish it. You speak of sympathies and feelings : I, too, have felt with a tenderness which your sex cannot know; but I am resolute in my ambition to trample on all that obstructs my way to a crown. Look to me, and be ashamed of your weakness.’ ”

Campbell, most happily we think, terms Macbeth “ weak and facile to wickedness.”

Now the idea of a man (the natural instincts of whose heart were benevolent, but who was, yet, unprincipled and weak)—sensitively alive to the opinions of his fellow-men—anxious for their esteem, and yet, withal, ambitious—the idea, we

say, of such a man, whose character rendered him peculiarly accessible to temptation, being placed in circumstances that tested his capacity of resisting the evil suggestions of the supernatural agents of darkness, and the criminal instigations of his wife, is at once suggestive of those struggles with a better nature, which, according to the authorities we have just cited, his soliloquy and his whole bearing previous to the assassination so strikingly display. In the inmost heart and mind of a man like this, we are prepared to witness that desperate contest which we appear, subsequently, to behold between his wish and his horror of the means by which alone it can be realized. His half-formed determination to murder Duncan, visible in the lines—

“ Stars, hide your fires !

Let not light see my black and deep desires :

The eye wink at the hand ! yet let that be,

Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see ! ”

shaken so shortly afterwards, even at his first meeting with his lady,—(the scruples which he feels apparent, as it seems to us, in his simple answer to Lady Macbeth’s question, “ And when goes hence ? ”

“To-morrow,—as he purposes,—

throughout the whole of that scene with his stern and resolute wife—as well as in his subsequent soliloquy) is exactly what we look for, if we adopt, as the true one, the common representation of Macbeth’s character. Taking this view of his moral nature, we regard his irresolution as the result of a noble shrinking of the inward Man from the execution of the horrible purpose he has conceived, rather than as the offspring of mere selfish apprehensiveness, in which light the reviewer considers it should be regarded. Thus, then, if we put the ordinary, and we might add the *loftier* construction upon his self-communings, it is clear that there is nothing *unintelligible* in such an interpretation of the character; so that this view of Macbeth’s nature cannot, of course, be rejected on the ground of its being inconsistent with *human* nature. Further, if we are right in conceiving that of the two representations of Macbeth, which, with the arguments in their favour, we propose to consider in the following pages, the ordinary idea of his moral nature betrays the higher genius in its author, it would seem but just to infer that the present prevailing

notion in regard to it must, also, have been Shakspeare's. It is not, however, worth while to enter upon the question as to which of these interpretations of the Dramatist's purpose would seem to convey the higher and more philosophical conception of the character, as there is, really, but one method of deciding the point at issue, viz. : by a reference to the words and spirit of the Poet's text. According to our interpretation of that text,—according to the impression it conveys to us of the low and worldly, or of the unselfish nature of those feelings to which Macbeth gives utterance in his moments of irresolution, must we regard him as a man having the instincts of an originally nobler nature within him, or, as the remorseless villain, which the reviewer considers him to have been from the very outset.

The necessity of thus conducting his inquiry into Macbeth's character was, we can hardly doubt, apparent to the reviewer.

“Let us proceed to examine,” he observes, “by the very sufficient light of Shakspeare's text, and by that alone, how far this view of Macbeth's character is just, on the one hand, towards the hero himself and to the other leading personages



of the drama,—on the other, to the Poet's own fame, whether as a Dramatist or a moralist." \*

The reviewer then proceeds to state his own view of Macbeth's character, which, after the foregoing observation, one would, of course, expect that he would be prepared to justify by showing it to be in accordance with the text of Shakspeare. Whether, however, his impression of the character has been derived solely from Shakspeare's text, let the reader determine.

The following are the reviewer's observations :—

"Macbeth is inspired by the very genius of the tempest. This drama shows us the gathering, the discharge, and the dispelling of a domestic and political storm, which takes its peculiar hue from the individual character of the hero. It is not in the spirit of mischief that animates the 'Weird Sisters,' nor in the passionate and strong-willed ambition of Lady Macbeth, that we find the mainspring of this tragedy,

\* The reviewer is alluding to the following observations on Macbeth by Hazlitt :—

"Macbeth is full of 'the milk of human kindness,' is frank, sociable, generous. He is tempted to the commission of guilt by golden opportunities, by the instigations of his wife, and by prophetic warnings. Fate and metaphysical aid conspire against his virtue and his loyalty."

but in the disproportioned though poetically-tempered soul of Macbeth himself. A character like his, of narrow selfishness, with a most irritable fancy, must produce, even in ordinary circumstances, an excess of morbid apprehensiveness; which, however, as we see in him, is not inconsistent with the greatest physical courage, but generates of necessity the most entire moral cowardice. When, therefore, a man like this, ill enough qualified even for the honest and straightforward transactions of life, is tempted and induced to snatch at an ambitious object by the commission of one great sanguinary crime, the new and false position in which he finds himself by his very success will but startle and exasperate him to escape, as Macbeth says, from 'horrible imaginings,' by the perpetration of greater and greater actual horrors, till inevitable destruction comes upon him, amidst universal execration. Such briefly are the story and the moral of Macbeth!"

There can be no doubt that Macbeth is induced to perpetrate "greater and greater actual horrors" in consequence of "the new and false position in which he finds himself," after he has assassinated Duncan. But the point which we have now to consider is Macbeth's character *before* he has placed himself in that new and false position. Now, in the foregoing extract, at the very commencement of the reviewer's criticism,

before a single passage has been quoted from the drama, we have a statement of the critic's own view of the character in question. We have a brief exposition of the story and moral of the play. Of course there can be no objection to the reviewer's commencing with a statement of the conclusion at which he has arrived in regard to Macbeth's nature, if he be prepared satisfactorily to show that he has formed that conclusion by a fair and impartial criticism of the entire tragedy. There can be no objection to his stating, at the commencement of his review, and even in more emphatic terms than those he has employed, that he regards the chief personage of the Drama, from the very first, as a hardened and cowardly villain, if, from the context, he be prepared to show that it was the Dramatist's purpose to represent Macbeth's nature under such an aspect. But we *do* object to his dispensing with proof altogether, after having *assumed*, at the outset of his criticism, such a view of the character as we have spoken of; and we say that proof is altogether dispensed with by the reviewer, when, after endeavouring to show that the scheme of

usurping the Scottish Crown by the murder of Duncan originated neither with Lady Macbeth, nor with the Weird Sisters, but with Macbeth himself, we find him writing in the following strain:—

“How, then, does Macbeth really stand before us at the very opening of the Drama? We see in him a near kinsman of ‘the gracious Duncan,’ occupying the highest place in the favour and confidence of his King and relative,—a warrior of the greatest prowess, employed in suppressing a dangerous rebellion, and in repelling a foreign invader, aided also by the treachery of that thane of Cawdor whose forfeited honours the grateful King bestows on his successful general. Yet all the while this man, so actively engaged in putting down other traitors, cherishes against his King, kinsman, and benefactor, a purpose of tenfold blacker treason than any of those against which he has been defending him,—the purpose, not suggested to him by any one, but gratuitously and deliberately formed within his own breast, of murdering his royal kinsman with his own hand, in order, by that means, to usurp his crown. With every motive to loyalty and to gratitude, yet his lust of power is so eager and so inordinate, as to overcome every opposing consideration of honour, principle, and feeling. To understand aright the true spirit and moral of this great tragedy, it is most important that the reader or auditor should be well impressed at the outset with the conviction how bad a man, independently of all instigation from others, Macbeth must have been, to have once conceived such a design under such peculiar circumstances.

The first thing that strikes us in such a character is, the intense selfishness—the total absence both of sympathetic feeling and moral principle,—and the consequent incapability of remorse in the proper sense of the term.”

Now, we ask, have we here proof or mere assertion that Macbeth was “so bad a man” at the commencement of the tragedy? Let the reader carefully bear in mind that these expressions of the baseness of Macbeth’s nature are in consequence of the conclusion which the reviewer arrives at, after quoting a few passages from the Drama, that the idea of murdering Duncan originated with Macbeth.

To show that he first suggested the idea of assassination, the Westminster writer cites Lady Macbeth’s reply to her husband’s declaration—

“ I dare do all that may become a man ;  
Who dares do more, is none.”

The lady exclaims,

“ What beast was it, then,  
That made you break this enterprize to me ?  
—— Nor time, nor place  
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.”

Further he cites the salutation of the “Weird Sisters,”

"All hail, Macbeth! that shall be king hereafter;"

in which, the reviewer observes, there is not the remotest hint as to the means by which he is to obtain the crown; and he also quotes Macbeth's own observations while ruminating on the prophecy,

"If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me,  
Without my stir."

"Why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
&c. &c."

We shall presently attempt to show that these passages will not bear out the reviewer in his conclusion that the scheme of usurping the Scottish crown, by the murder of his Sovereign, originated with Macbeth. But even admitting that the project did originate with Macbeth himself, does this fact justify the immediate inference which the reviewer draws from it—does it warrant such a representation of Macbeth's character as is contained in the foregoing extract? The writer will not, surely, be prepared to affirm that there is as much crime in the *conception* as

in the *execution* of a horrible design; and, therefore, admitting the purpose of murdering his royal kinsman to have been “*gratuitously and deliberately formed within his own breast,*” does this fact, *of itself*, suffice to prove Macbeth to have been a monster of iniquity, without a particle of genuine compunction, devoid of the slightest “*sympathetic feeling and moral principle.*” Although entertaining the idea of assassination, Macbeth does not at once determine upon carrying that idea into execution. He does not leave the heath where he has conceived his treacherous intention, “settled and wrought up to the terrible feat;” he leaves the scene of his interview with the “Weird Sisters” with his mind in the exact state in which we can readily imagine the mind of a man to be, in whom there are two spirits—his better and his evil genius—striving for the mastery of his moral being. Can it, then, be rightly said, looking at Macbeth’s conduct on this occasion, that he has neither “*sympathetic feeling,*” nor “*moral principle*” in his nature? The reviewer may declare that Macbeth was morally incapable, on account of the irresolution of his nature, of at once arriving

at a fixed determination to murder Duncan. Grant that he was so; what then? In the irresolute character of Macbeth we may be abundantly furnished with an evidence of his mental weakness, but we are *not* furnished, in that single circumstance alone, with any evidence *whatsoever* of his moral baseness. The resolution of the stern and remorseless man, who, unwavering, performs his murderous design, the reviewer might reasonably offer as an evidence of the calousness of his heart, and of the degraded condition of his moral being; but although Macbeth's irresolution is not, necessarily, inconsistent with the total depravity of his moral nature, we cannot possibly regard the existence of that depravity as logically following from the fact of his irresolution visible in his conduct at the commencement of his career. Granting, then, that the writer is correct in his hypothesis as to the party with whom the idea of assassination originated, this admission is clearly insufficient to sustain the reviewer's assertion as to the utter baseness of Macbeth's character at the commencement of the Drama; and if it be insufficient,



the reviewer, as we have before said, has merely assumed that Macbeth was so bad a man at the outset, without having advanced anything to show that he really was so.

But, it may be remarked, in answer to the foregoing observations, that although his reasoning may be illogical, the conclusion which the reviewer arrives at may, notwithstanding, be correct;—that although it may be clearly illogical to infer, as the reviewer seems to have done, the utter depravity of Macbeth's nature from the single circumstance that he first conceived the idea of assassinating Duncan, still, if Macbeth's subsequent scruples were not dictated by generous impulses, if they were the offspring of prudential considerations alone, if he *only* wavered in his purpose because he was influenced by the most selfish apprehensions, in that case, the observation would be justifiable, that "with every motive to loyalty and to gratitude, yet his lust of power was so eager and so inordinate, as to overcome every opposing consideration of honour, principle, and feeling." But this view of the cause of that repugnance to commit the murder

which Macbeth afterwards evinced, has again the reviewer's assertion, solely, for its foundation. It is refuted, not only by Macbeth's inward struggles with his murderous thought, when he is first introduced to us, but, also, by his subsequent soliloquy, and, more particularly, by the following passage in that soliloquy :

“ He's here in double trust ;

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,  
Strong both against the deed ; then, as his host,  
Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like Angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off ;”

We demand of any impartial reader of the tragedy, whether such passages as these show that it was owing, solely, to selfish considerations that Macbeth wavered in his purpose of assassination ? The reviewer, we are aware, gives the above passages a very different construction from the one ordinarily adopted ;\* but after having

\* “ In all this,” the reviewer remarks, “ we trace a most clear consciousness of the impossibility that he should find of

assumed, at the outset, the utter depravity of Macbeth's character, we do not well see how he could avoid regarding the sentiments uttered by Macbeth both before and after the murder, as springing either from feelings entirely selfish, or from a "morbidly irritable fancy." In those bursts of passionate declamation which escape from the murderer after he has assassinated Duncan, the reviewer, who from the beginning has conceived so bad an opinion of his character, may very fairly regard Macbeth as "merely luxuriating in the most poetical view of his own atrocity." Setting out with such an impression of his moral nature, he will, of course, attribute the utterance of such passages as the following to a highly poetical imagination, rather than "to a glowing and feeling heart."

masking his guilt from the public eye—the odium which must consequently fall upon him in the opinions of men—and the retribution which it would probably bring upon him." Assertion is not proof. The reviewer advances no argument at all in support of the inference which he thus draws from the soliloquy of which the above lines are a portion. It will be for us presently to show that the inference itself is erroneous.

*Macb.* This is a sorry sight.

*Lady M.* A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

*Macb.* There's one did laugh in his sleep, and one cried,  
*murder !*

That they did wake each other ; I stood and heard them ;  
But they did say their prayers, and addressed them  
Again to sleep.

*Lady M.* There are two lodged together.

*Macb.* One cried, *God bless us !* and, *Amen*, the other ;  
As they had seen me, with these hangman's hands,  
Listening their fear. I could not say, Amen,  
When they did say, God bless us.

*Lady M.* Consider it not so deeply.

*Macb.* But wherefore could not I pronounce, amen ?  
I had most need of blessing, and amen  
Stuck in my throat.

*Lady M.* These deeds must not be thought  
After these ways ; so, it will make us mad.

*Macb.* Methought I heard a voice cry, *Sleep no more !*

&c. ....

.....

*Lady M.* Why did you bring these daggers from the place ?

..... Go, carry them ; and smear  
The sleepy grooms with blood.

*Macb.* I'll go no more :

I am afraid to think what I have done ;  
Look on't again I dare not.

*Lady M.*           Infirm of purpose!  
 Give me the daggers: The sleeping and the dead  
 Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood  
 That fears a painted devil. [*Exit.*

[*Knocking within.*

*Macb.*           Whence is that knocking?  
 How is't with me, when every noise appals me?  
 What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes!  
 Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
 Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather  
 The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
 Making the green one—red.

*Re-enter Lady Macbeth.*

*Lady M.* My hands are of your colour; but I shame  
 To wear a heart so white, &c. . . . .  
 . . . . . Be not lost  
 So poorly in your thoughts.

*Macb.* To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.

[*Knock.*

Wake Duncan with thy knocking; Ay, would thou could'st!

Now did we believe that Macbeth was utterly remorseless at the opening of the tragedy, we could not but consider his utterance of the foregoing passages, in that spirit of sincerity with which it is usually supposed that Shakspeare intended they should be delivered by his hero,



to be wholly inconsistent with his real nature. Let us, however, on the other hand, suppose that Macbeth was *not* destitute of the kindlier feelings of humanity at the commencement of the drama, and then the expression of his better feelings, even *after* his perpetration of the murder, which the above passages, according to their ordinary interpretation, convey, would, clearly, not be inconsistent with such an impression of his moral nature. We thus see how much depends upon the assertion that the murderer was totally remorseless at the opening of the tragedy; while, to prove that he was so, there is positively before us nothing but the fact, as stated by the reviewer, that Macbeth himself first conceived the idea of assassinating the king.

We will now state, as concisely as we can, our own view of Macbeth's character at the opening of the tragedy. Of course, if the idea of murder "was not suggested to him by any one," but was "gratuitously and deliberately formed within his own breast," the reader will entertain a much worse opinion of Macbeth than he would form of him if he supposed that he was tempted and

impelled by others to the commission of assassination. Now we are of the writer's opinion that "Macbeth attracts the attention, and excites the interest of the Weird Sisters through the sympathy which evil ever has with evil," but we deny that he attracts their attention and excites their interest, because 'he *already harbours a wicked design.*' The reviewer says that "Macbeth attracts their attention and excites their interest, through the sympathy which evil ever has with evil—because he already harbours a wicked design—because mischief is germinating in his breast, which their influence is capable of fomenting." . . . . .

"Macbeth does not project the murder of Duncan because of his encounter with the Weird Sisters; the Weird Sisters encounter him because he has projected the murder—because they know him better than his royal master does, who tells us, 'There is no art to find the mind's construction in the face.' But these ministers of evil are privileged to see the 'mind's construction' where human eye cannot penetrate in the mind itself."



In an earlier portion of his criticism, the reviewer remarks :—

“ The prophetic words in which the attainment of royalty is promised him contain not the remotest hint as to the means by which he is to arrive at it. They are simply—

‘ All hail, Macbeth ! that shall be King hereafter ;’  
an announcement which, it is plain, should have rather inclined a man who was *not* already harbouring a scheme of guilty ambition, to wait quietly the course of events, saying to himself, as even Macbeth observes, while ruminating on this prediction,—

‘ If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,  
Without my stir ;’

so that, according to Macbeth’s own admission, the words of the Weird Sisters on this occasion convey anything rather than an incitement to murder to the mind of a man who is not meditating it already. ‘ This supernatural soliciting ’ is only made such to the mind of Macbeth by the fact that he is already occupied with a purpose of assassination.”

Nothing can more strikingly exemplify the difference between the characters of the two chieftains than the different reception given by Banquo and Macbeth to the salutations of the Weird Sisters. Clear enough is it that, had Macbeth been as virtuous a man as Banquo, he would have listened to their declarations with the same



calmness as his friend. Macbeth, however, is both ambitious and lax in principle; and *therefore*, and not, necessarily, because he is *already harbouring* a scheme of guilty ambition, he cannot possibly receive with calmness the prophetic greeting—

“All hail, Macbeth! that shall be King hereafter;”

A man like Macbeth must necessarily feel inclined to *ruminate upon the means of obtaining* the greatness which is promised him. “To be King,” he says, “stands not within the prospect of belief.” Duncan, like Cawdor, “lives a prosperous gentleman.” Malcolm and Donaldbain are the heirs to the Scottish Crown. The reflection that alone by *not* waiting the ordinary course of events, can the prophecy, supposing it capable of accomplishment by human means, be realized, might, under such circumstances, without any degree of improbability, occur to such a personage as Macbeth upon his receiving the announcement of future royalty.

The Weird Sisters do not, in express terms, counsel Macbeth to become a murderer; they

merely place vividly before him a prospect of greatness, the attainment of which by honourable means appears to him impossible. We say, then, that these supernatural beings, although they do not *speak* of the perpetration of a crime, do yet, evidently, suggest to Macbeth's mind the idea of assassinating Duncan, through which means alone, as it appears to him, can their prediction be realized.

Instead, then, of observing that the prophetic greeting, addressed to Macbeth, is an announcement which "should have rather inclined a man who was *not* already harbouring a scheme of guilty ambition to wait quietly the course of events,"—the reviewer would have made a more correct observation, if he had stated that such an announcement would have inclined a man who, like Banquo, was truly honourable and virtuous, quietly to await the advent of circumstances; seeing that it is by no means inconsistent,—as we have just shown, but is in entire conformity with Macbeth's character,—that he should not have been satisfied to have remained quiescent until events had brought about of themselves the fulfilment of the

prophecy, but should have at once ruminated upon the means of obtaining possession of the Crown. Now we have seen that, in the circumstances in which Macbeth was placed, there could hardly have appeared to him any other mode than the one which occurs to his imagination of obtaining the greatness which had been foretold him; and, from the actual, or even the apparent, impossibility of achieving it by any other means than by the commission of a crime, we have endeavoured to argue, that it is the Weird Sisters themselves who convey to Macbeth's mind the suggestion of murder. It is easy, however, still further to show that owing, mainly, to their intervention does the chieftain fasten on the idea of assassination. Macbeth, it is plain, would not have ruminated upon *the means* of realizing the prediction of the Weird Sisters, if he had had no belief in the possibility of its fulfilment; and, it is "the sympathy which evil ever has with evil," which induces him to confide in their declarations; since, from the example of Banquo, it is evident that a good man would not have reposed that perfect confidence which is placed by Mac-



beth in the truth of a prophecy coming from such a quarter. "It must not be forgotten," Mr. Knight observes, "that Macbeth was inclined to superstition before the guilt, and that his faith in superhuman agencies went far to produce the guilt." Once, then, let Macbeth place the implicit confidence which he *does* place in the promises of the Weird Sisters, and there is an end to all choice or option on his part as to *the means* he shall adopt for their fulfilment. The same evil nature which causes him to rely upon a prophecy emanating from so equivocal a source makes him fully aware, at the same time, that only by *crime* can that prophecy be realized. No sooner does he begin to commune with himself upon the nature of that which has been promised him, than he at once fathers the suggestion of murder within his own breast upon the supernatural soliciting of the Weird Sisters.

"This supernatural soliciting  
 Cannot be ill; cannot be good; if ill,  
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
 Commencing in a truth?  
 If good, *why do I yield to that suggestion*

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
 Against the use of nature?"

These last lines plainly show that Macbeth himself believes that, by "yielding to that suggestion," he is rendering himself a passive instrument of evil in the hands of those who have addressed him on "the Imperial theme." "The supernatural soliciting" is by himself condemned *on account of the suggestion to which it immediately gives birth*. Let not the reader, adopting the reviewer's impression of Macbeth's character, be induced to suppose that it is his mental cowardice which makes him endeavour to evade the responsibility attaching to his own thoughts and actions, and to trace the source to his strange visitors of that suggestion which in reality has its origin solely in the wickedness of his own heart. It should be remembered that, although the prophecies of the Weird Sisters have a widely different effect upon the minds of the two chieftains, Macbeth, owing, as we have remarked, to the "sympathy which evil ever has with evil," placing the firmest reliance upon the truth of

their assertions, upon which Banquo's integrity does not suffer him to dwell—their opinions are, nevertheless, similar in regard to the character and designs of these supernatural beings.

In reply to the question,

“Do you not hope your children shall be kings?”

&c. &c.

Banquo says :

“That, trusted home,

Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,

Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange ;

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,

The instruments of darkness tell us truths ;

Win us with honest trifles, to betray us

In deepest consequence.”

Thus we see that Macbeth and Banquo have a similar impression in regard to the evil nature of these agents of darkness ; and if Macbeth (not necessarily from an overweening anxiety to palliate the criminality of his intentions, and to shift the blame of them upon others) be justified, as we consider him to be, in imputing to *them* the horrible idea which has taken possession of his thoughts, how can we separate the murderous suggestion in the hero's mind from the super-

natural soliciting of the Weird Sisters? The reader, then, while fully impressed with the enormity of Macbeth's guilt in conceiving, under *any* circumstances, the crime he meditated, must still, we think, admit that it is altogether erroneous to assert that the purpose of murdering his royal kinsman was not suggested to him by any one, but was gratuitously and deliberately formed within his own breast.

There is nothing to lead us to suppose that Macbeth would have conceived the purpose of assassination if it had not been for those words of prophecy with which he was saluted by the Weird Sisters; and, although it is quite true that there is nothing in the words themselves—looking at them apart from the evil desires and unhallowed promptings of Macbeth's heart—to induce him to perpetrate a murder, this does not render it the less true that the worst passions in Macbeth's nature were excited and called forth by the announcement of greatness which those words contained.

We now come to the reviewer's other assertion that the notion that Lady Macbeth "was the

first contriver of the plot, and suggester of the assassination," is refuted, not merely by implication, in the whole tenour of the piece, but most explicitly by that particular passage where the lady, exerting the valour of her tongue to fortify her husband's wavering purpose, answers his objection,

" I dare do all that may become a man;  
Who dares do more, is none;"

by saying,

" What beast was it, then,  
That made you break this enterprise to me?  
..... Nor time, nor place,  
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both."

Lady Macbeth was certainly not the suggester of the assassination, for we have just seen that it was the Weird Sisters who first suggested to Macbeth the idea of murdering Duncan. Nevertheless, from the whole tenor of the piece, we are prepared to show that it was solely through Lady Macbeth's instigation,—by the powerful influence which she possessed, and did not fail to exercise over her husband's mind, that he was finally prevailed upon to perpetrate the murder.



So far, then, as the exercise of that influence was concerned, Lady Macbeth must be regarded as the contriver of Duncan's assassination. With regard to the particular passage cited by the reviewer, it should be remembered that, in the scene in which it is uttered by Lady Macbeth, she is endeavouring to overcome her husband's objections to the enterprise they had mutually proposed to undertake. As long as she succeeds in persuading Macbeth to commit the murder, it matters not to her how that object is accomplished. In the passage just quoted, for the attainment of her purpose, she asserts what is *absolutely untrue*. Macbeth did *not* break the enterprise to his wife. In the letter which she receives from him, after his first appearance on the heath, he makes no mention of the horrible fancies which he at that time entertained, but he gives an account of his interview with the "Weird Sisters," and informs her of the greatness which is promised to herself. Upon his return to his own castle, the first words which he addresses to his wife are,

" My dearest Love,  
Duncan comes here to-night."

In answer to her enquiry, "And when goes hence?" he says, "To-morrow,—as he purposes." While Lady Macbeth, upon receiving that reply, immediately exclaims:—

"O, never  
Shall sun that morrow see!"

Whatever motive may have restrained Macbeth, from plainly declaring his murderous intention, it is the fact that he does *not* communicate that intention to his wife; on the contrary, it is she herself who, in distinct terms, first expresses to her husband the idea of Duncan's assassination.

"He that's coming  
Must be provided for; and you shall put  
This night's great business into my dispatch."

Thus, then, if we take this view of the peculiar influences under which Macbeth was induced to entertain the idea of murder,—if we suppose that it was the Weird Sisters who first suggested that idea,—it is easy to imagine that, when those who had tempted him were no longer actually present to his senses, Macbeth may really have experienced a degree of moral aversion to the scheme of assassination. What more natural

than that he should not have yielded immediately to temptation, but should have vehemently wrestled with the suggestion of his evil counsellors. When, then, we have before us passages clearly indicating a state of mind averse to the commission of a guilty deed, unless those passages afford evidence of his pusillanimity, why should we impute their utterance by Macbeth to mere nervous irritability, or to considerations purely selfish? The passages we allude to, far from warranting any such construction, forcibly depict, as it seems to us, the irresolution of a man, earnestly bent on the attainment of an ambitious purpose, while his nobler nature shrinks with horror from the means which his heart, at the instigation of the Weird Sisters, has suggested for its accomplishment. Macbeth closes his self-communings, after his first meeting with his tempters, with the following declaration:—

“Come what come may,

Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.”

In this passage the thought over which he has been brooding appears almost to have faded from his mind. Concluding his soliloquy in these

words, it seems as if he had determined to act upon the notion which but a moment before had been presented to him, viz., that

“ If chance would have him King, why, chance might crown him ! ”

His purpose, indeed, he has not, in reality, suppressed ; but, still, far from assuming a bolder and more decided outline, as he reasons on the horrible idea which had taken possession of his whole being, it seems to grow fainter and less distinct on his imagination. Here, then, we have sufficient evidence that, after Macbeth's first interview with the Weird Sisters, he *does* struggle with their criminal suggestions—half resolves to lay aside his purpose ; influenced, be it observed, by no prudential considerations, for the words which he employs have sole reference to the guilty nature of the action he is meditating.

That his purpose is *not* laid aside—that his better feelings have *not* triumphed over his evil nature—that a slight circumstance suffices to reawaken his horrible intention in his breast, is shown in the scene following, after Duncan's address to the nobles :—

"Sons, kinsmen, thanes,

And you, whose places are the nearest, know,  
We will establish our estate upon  
Our eldest, Malcolm ; whom we name hereafter  
The Prince of Cumberland : which honour must  
Not, unaccompanied, invest him only,  
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine  
On all deservers.—From hence to Inverness,  
And bind us further to you.

*Macb.* The rest is labour, which is not used for you :  
I'll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful  
The hearing of my wife with your approach ;  
So humbly take my leave.

*Dun.* My worthy Cawdor !

*Macb. (aside)* The Prince of Cumberland !—That is a step  
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,  
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires !  
Let not light see my black and deep desires :  
The eye wink at the hand ! yet let that be,  
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. [Exit.

*Dun.* True, worthy Banquo ; he is full so valiant ;  
And in his commendations I am fed ;  
It is a banquet to me. Let us after him,  
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome :  
It is a peerless kinsman."

Upon these passages the reviewer comments as



follows:—"Here, surely, is a depth of cold-blooded treachery which is truly immeasurable—seeing that the 'peerless kinsman' is really gone before to 'make joyful the hearing of his wife' with the news that they are to have immediately the wished-for opportunity of murdering their worthy kinsman and sovereign." The depth of cold-blooded treachery which the above lines, according to the reviewer, exhibit, is, of course, illustrated in the immediate execution of the deed to which they make such evident allusion. If Macbeth's treachery be not at once illustrated in this manner, how is it so *manifest*? Now, in the scene immediately following the one where the above declaration is elicited from Macbeth, upon his first meeting with his wife, the man who in his heart is already guilty of the assassination of his Sovereign—whose depth of treachery is such that he has firmly resolved upon imbruing his hands in the blood of his host and benefactor—Macbeth, burning to impart to his spouse the information that the opportunity of obtaining what they both so ardently desire has at length arrived, after having exclaimed—

" My dearest love,

Duncan comes here to-night,"

answers the query which his wife immediately puts, "And when goes hence?" with the words, "To-morrow,—as he purposes." Lady Macbeth's energetic exclamation

" O, never

Shall sun that morrow see,"

with her admirable advice in reference to the hypocrisy it will be necessary for the murderer to assume—her recommendation that he should

" bear welcome in his eye,

His hand, his tongue, look like the innocent flower,

But be the serpent under it,"

fail in eliciting from her husband any signs of that atrocious villany of which the reviewer considers his previous exclamation sufficient to convict him. In his reply to his wife's eloquence, Macbeth does not show that he, as well as his lady, has, at this period of the Drama, determined that Duncan "must be provided for," for the only answer which he makes to her harangue is, "We will speak further;" while, the very next time that he appears upon the stage, it is to give

utterance to those strongly expressed doubts contained in the soliloquy to which we have already alluded.

The passage, then, commencing,

“ Stars, hide your fires !

Let not light see my black and deep desires,”

shows, as we have just now said, that the idea which Macbeth had previously conceived, and with which he had wrestled, he had not in reality excluded from his thoughts; but it no more shows that, at the time of his uttering the foregoing exclamation, his purpose was already formed of violating the rights of hospitality by the murder of his royal kinsman, than his first conception of the murder shows that he had, at that period, firmly resolved upon carrying into effect his treacherous design. In order to take a correct view of Macbeth's character at this period of the Drama, we must not look solely at particular expressions in detached passages of the play, but at the nature of his whole conduct from its commencement. Now we have just seen what that conduct was. Through the instrumentality of the Weird Sisters, Macbeth first



conceives the idea of murdering his benefactor ; immediately, however, he wrestles with that idea, and, for the moment, apparently resolves upon leaving it to chance to obtain for him the crown ; in the following scene his design is again expressed in language the purport of which it is impossible to misunderstand, while, in the scene following that, he avoids any allusion to the project in which, but a short time before, his mind had been absorbed. We now see that the eloquence of his wife is ineffectual in inducing him to execute his purpose, for, it is immediately after his interview with her, that he utters the soliloquy at the conclusion of which, as Mrs. Siddons observes, "he wisely determines to proceed no further in the business." The discrepancy which is here apparent between Macbeth's conduct and his evident desire to obtain possession of the crown, admits of an explanation perfectly consistent with the view which we have expressed of the original remorsefulness of the hero's character.

Macbeth is, in a great measure, the sport of circumstances : — his first determinations are



usually regulated by them ; but he does not—at least he does not at the commencement of his career—at once act upon the determinations he has formed, because he is not wholly without principle. But, although Macbeth is not utterly deficient in principle, he is totally destitute of any *strength* of principle ; the virtuous resolutions and good intentions of *one* moment are not in him of sufficient strength to withstand the criminal suggestions of *another*. His conduct fully illustrates the truth of the foregoing observations. Through the influence of external circumstances — through the presence of the Weird Sisters, Macbeth is induced to entertain the idea of assassination ; but, when the visible presence of these supernatural beings is no longer exercising an immediate influence upon his thoughts, we see that principle intervenes, and that Macbeth half resolves to lay aside his purpose. Afterwards, when Duncan calls upon the nobles to recognise Malcolm as their future king, Macbeth's horrible design starts into life at once ; the prediction of the Weird Sisters is again brought forcibly home to him by the emphatic

declaration of his Sovereign ; the crown, which is the object of his ambitious thoughts, he hears solemnly bequeathed unto another ; his half-formed virtuous resolutions of the preceding scene are powerless, under such circumstances, to restrain the unhallowed aspirations of his mind, eager to snatch at the only visible means of securing to himself the crown he covets, by the murder of the man who is his kinsman, his benefactor, and is about to become his guest. When, however, the immediate cause, or, perhaps, we should rather say, the immediate influence of the cause which has wrung from him his murderous declaration, is withdrawn, his better nature is again awakened ;—selfish considerations are now scarcely the motives that make him shrink from the contemplated murder ; it is because he is sensible of the enormous wickedness of the action which the Weird Sisters, in the first instance, had suggested—it is because feelings of remorse and shame come crowding on his brain and heart—it is because of the burning sense of infamy in the thought that he who should *protect*—who “against the murderer should shut the door,” is

about "to bear the knife himself,"—it is because he feels a genuine horror of the crime, a strong and heartfelt conviction of "the deep damnation of his taking off," that he determines to relinquish his design.

Let us now glance at the construction which the reviewer puts upon Macbeth's conduct, previous to his commission of the murder.

The reviewer, of course, considers, that his guilty purpose of obtaining possession of the crown by means of Duncan's assassination, was already formed at the time of his uttering the exclamation :—

" Stars, hide your fires !

Let not light see my black and deep desires ; "

and maintains, that he never relents from that purpose, " however he may falter in its execution." Consequently, when he addresses Lady Macbeth, thus :—

" My dearest love,

Duncan comes here to-night ; "

and answers her enquiry, " And when goes hence ? " with the words " To-morrow,—as he purposes ; " " It is not," the reviewer remarks, " that Macbeth

wavers either in the desire of his object, or in *his liking for the means* ; but that the more imminent he feels the execution to be, the more he shrinks from the worldly responsibility that may follow, and the more he is driven to lean for support on the moral resolution of his wife." Again the reviewer considers that Mrs. Siddons was led by the critical oracles of the day erroneously to impute Macbeth's hesitation as evinced in the foregoing passage, to his virtuous repugnance to the scheme of assassination, instead of to his selfish fears. But is it not remarkable, if it be merely selfish fear and not virtuous repugnance which the lady is chiding in the scene alluded to, that, in the one immediately following, influenced by considerations of loyalty and justice, Macbeth should announce the determination he had formed of relinquishing his design? Is not the utterance by Macbeth of such sentiments as are contained in the soliloquy commencing "If it were done," altogether inconsistent with the idea that the cause of his previous hesitation lay in his selfish fears? We are aware that the reviewer denies that, in his subsequent refusal to proceed further in the

business, Macbeth was influenced by any than by the most selfish considerations. "It is from no compunctious visitings of nature," he observes, "but from sheer moral cowardice—from fear of retribution in this life—that we find Macbeth shrinking, at the last moment, from the commission of this enormous crime. This will be seen the more, the more attentively we consider his soliloquy :—

"If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
 It were done quickly : If the assassination  
 Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,  
 With his surcease, success ; that but this blow  
 Might be the be-all, and the end-all, here,  
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
 We'd jump the life to come.—But, in these cases,  
 We still have judgment here ; that we but teach  
 Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
 To plague the inventor : This even-handed justice  
 Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice  
 To our own lips. He's here in double trust :  
 First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,  
 Strong both against the deed ; then, as his host,  
 Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
 Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan  
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been

So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off;

&c. &c. ....

Again to Lady Macbeth :

“ We will proceed no further in this business :  
He hath honoured me of late ; and I have bought  
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon.”

“ In all this we trace a most clear consciousness of the impossibility that he should find of masking his guilt from the public eye,—the odium which must consequently fall upon him in the opinions of men,—and the retribution which it would probably bring upon him. But here is no evidence of true moral repugnance—and as little of any religious scruple :—

“ We’d jump the life to come.”

“ The dramatist, by this brief but significant parenthesis, has taken care to leave us in no doubt on a point so momentous towards forming a due estimate of the conduct of his hero. However, he feels, as we see, the dissuading motives of worldly prudence in all their force. But one

devouring passion urges him on—the master-passion of his life—the lust of power :

‘ I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent ; but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself,  
And falls on the other—’

Still, it should seem that the considerations of policy and safety regarding this life would ever have withheld him from the actual commission of the murder, had not the spirit of his wife come in to fortify his failing purpose.”

If, indeed, the foregoing were a fair interpretation of the murderer’s motives in the delivery of the soliloquy quoted by the reviewer, the construction which he puts upon Macbeth’s silence during his previous interview with his wife would, at any rate, be consistent with the sentiments subsequently uttered by Macbeth. But, we utterly deny that it is anything like a fair interpretation of the motives and feelings under the influence of which Macbeth gives utterance to the soliloquy alluded to. Let us attentively examine that soliloquy for ourselves.

“ If the assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,



With his surcease, success ; that but this blow  
 Might be the be-all, and the end-all, here,  
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
 We'd jump the life to come."

If, with Duncan's assassination, the fearful consequences attending the commission of a despicable action could be immediately suppressed, Macbeth argues that he would not be deterred, by the dread of consequences in a future life, from the perpetration of the murder ;

" We'd jump the life to come."

It is the dread of consequences in *this* life which makes him waver in his purpose.

The reviewer considers, that Shakspeare has put the words " We'd jump the life to come" into his hero's mouth for the purpose of showing that religious considerations had nothing at all to do with Macbeth's hesitation in regard to Duncan's assassination. " The dramatist," he remarks, " by this brief, but significant parenthesis, has taken care to leave us in no doubt on a point so momentous towards forming a due estimate of the conduct of his hero." Why, who could possibly entertain a doubt upon what the reviewer considers as so momentous a point ? The idea of

a man who is revolving in his mind the commission of a murder being religious! He might, certainly, *affect* to be so, but Macbeth, it is plain, affects nothing of the kind; and Shakspeare has put "this brief and significant parenthesis"—as the reviewer terms it—into his hero's mouth, not because he would inform the reader that a man meditating a murder is not to be deterred by religious considerations from his purpose, but because they are necessary to the train of reasoning which Macbeth is pursuing. He is weighing in his mind the various considerations calling upon him to refrain from murder. The dread of consequences in another world does not, he says, form part of those considerations,—forethought of the consequences in *this* influences him solely. The question before us then, is, what is the *nature* of those consequences to which Macbeth refers?

"But, in these cases,

We still have judgment here; that we but teach  
 Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
 To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice  
 Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice  
 To our own lips."

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It frequently happens, no doubt, that men are withheld from the commission of a crime by the fear of being hanged. Not exactly of this nature are the apprehensions, although largely partaking of the same worldly calculation of results, which, according to the reviewer, restrain Macbeth from the instantaneous performance of his horrible design. Nevertheless, the *language* of the preceding passage furnishes us with no evidence to show that Macbeth was labouring under any such apprehensions as those of which the reviewer speaks. All that is conveyed by the preceding passage is, that crime cannot be committed even in this world with impunity,—that “we still have judgment here,”—that “bloody instructions, being taught, return to plague the inventor,”—that “this even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our-own lips.” From the tenor of the last-quoted observations we learn that Macbeth wavers in his purpose because he shrinks from the consequences of the crime he meditates; but in what *the nature* of those consequences consists, the language of the foregoing passage does not specify. Looking at that pas-

sage apart from the rest of the soliloquy, we do not learn from it whether it is solely from a moral or from a purely worldly retribution that Macbeth recoils. In fact, neither the lines we have already quoted, nor those of any other portion of the soliloquy, can be truly represented as expressing upon Macbeth's part "a consciousness of the impossibility that he should find of masking his guilt from the public eye,—the odium which must consequently fall upon him in the opinions of men,—and the retribution which it would probably bring upon him;" and, therefore, it can only be by *implication* that the reviewer imputes the murderer's hesitation to the operation of selfish considerations alone. Now the whole tenor of the soliloquy seems to us to justify a directly opposite conclusion.

" He's here in double trust ;

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,  
Strong both against the deed ; then, as his host,  
Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself."

These words display Macbeth's own consciousness of the enormity of the crime he medi-

tates. The magnitude of the guilt is alluded to in this sentence in the strongest terms, but there is not the remotest reference here made to "the impossibility of masking his guilt from the public eye,—to the odium which must consequently fall upon him in the opinions of men,—and to the retribution which it would probably bring upon him." But, although Macbeth makes no allusion to the chances of detection, the reviewer might reply, it is, nevertheless, of *that* that he is thinking—of the odium and retribution which would be the consequence of failure,—when he refers to the damning nature of the act he contemplates. Do, then, the passages which follow, in a yet stronger point of view, evince the selfish apprehensions under which Macbeth is labouring?

" Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
 So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
 The deep damnation of his taking off;  
 And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
 Striding the blast, or Heaven's cherubim, horsed

Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
 That tears shall drown the wind."

If Macbeth, while giving utterance to such reflections as these, which seem to proceed from the very depths of a conscience-stricken heart, be, all the while, merely apprehensive of the consequences of failure, he certainly has a most original method of expressing the inordinate apprehensions of which he is the slave. Had selfish considerations been as strong within him as the reviewer has represented, would not the idea of avenging demons rather than of angels pleading "trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation of his taking off" have occurred to the imagination of so pitiful a villain: and while fearing lest

"Heaven's cherubim  
 Might blow the horrid deed in every eye,"

would it be to *tears only* that the despicable ruffian would allude, while dreading the retribution that might follow the commission of the crime? Upon Lady Macbeth's entrance, at the conclusion

of his self-conference, Macbeth makes the following declaration—

“ We will proceed no further in this business :  
 He hath honoured me of late ; and I have bought  
 Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
 Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,  
 Not cast aside so soon.”

In this passage we trace the frank expression at the moment of a generous mind, which regards in yet blacker colours the crime it meditates, on account of the base ingratitude which that crime involves.

“ He hath *honoured* me of late.”

Keenly sensitive, as a not utterly degraded mind must be, of the loss of his own self-respect, and of the esteem of all good men, he shrinks from the commission of a deed which would render him utterly unworthy of the “ golden opinions” he has so lately won.

If, then, the soliloquy we have been considering, as well as Macbeth’s frank declaration to his wife, “ We will proceed no further in this business,” show, as we have endeavoured to point out, that it is through conscientious scruples,

and not from selfish considerations, that Macbeth at this time wavers in his purpose, surely to the same moral repugnance to commit the crime he has conceived, must we attribute the hesitation which he had previously displayed during his first interview with his wife.

But let us now meet the reviewer on his own grounds ; and, for the sake of argument, we will grant that it was his selfish apprehensions alone which elicited from Macbeth the doubts expressed in the soliloquy referred to. We shall now show that this admission necessarily involves the most absurd suppositions. The reviewer observes that Macbeth “ does not consult his lady as to the *formation* of his purposes—he is too selfish and too headstrong for that ; he simply uses her moral courage, as he seeks to use all other things, as an indispensable instrument to stay his own faltering steps, and urge on his hesitating march towards the attainment of a purpose *already formed*.”

“ Thus, the most remarkable of these fond appeals to his lady for moral support, bursts from him at the moment when he comes to announce



to her the sudden arrival of the wished-for opportunity of executing their grand and long-meditated design :—

‘ My dearest love,

Duncan comes here to-night.’ ”

The reviewer argues that in these words Macbeth’s selfish pusillanimity “is simply seeking to cast upon his wife the burden of the final decision as to the act of murder. When to her own suggestive query, ‘And when goes hence?’ he answers, ‘To-morrow—as he purposes,’ is it not most clear that, still avoiding an explicit declaration of his immediate wish, he persists in urging the first utterance of it from her own lips :—

‘ Oh, never

Shall sun that morrow see!

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men

May read strange matters ; —To beguile the time,

Look like the time ; bear welcome in your eye,

Your hand, your tongue ; look like the innocent flower,

But be the serpent under it. He that’s coming

Must be provided for ; and you shall put

This night’s great business into my despatch,

Which shall to all our nights and days to come  
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom !'

"This is exactly what her husband has been looking for ; she has now taken the actual effort and immediate responsibility of the deed upon herself. Nevertheless, the selfishly covetous and murderous coward still *affects* to hesitate—

' We will speak further.'

She knows his meaning, and rejoins—

' Only look up clear ;  
To alter favour ever is to fear :  
*Leave all the rest to me !*'

And to her, well understanding her intention, Macbeth is well pleased so to leave it."

Now we can readily understand that a man who has resolved upon the commission of a murder may, nevertheless, from the utter selfishness of his nature and the pusillanimity of his mind, feel desirous that the proposal of assassination should emanate from another. Thus we can understand that Macbeth, if his nature be as selfish as the reviewer has represented it to be, may desire "to cast upon his wife the burden of the

final decision as to the act of murder." But now, observe, assuming this view of the hero's character, how strong must be Macbeth's selfish fears,—how keen must be his sense of the possibility of failure,—how great his dread of the consequences of detection, when, *although* his purpose is already formed, and the moral support to which he appeals furnished him,—*although* he has deliberately elicited from his wife the distinct declaration that the deed of horror shall be consummated,—we still find him hesitating to carry his design into execution. It is not true the reviewer's assertion—that Macbeth *affects* to hesitate; whatever may be the *motives* of his hesitation, it is unfeigned.

Is it, then, conceivable that Macbeth, *with his earnest desire to obtain possession of the crown*, while from the realization of his most cherished project *he is withheld only by his fears*,—is it conceivable that he would not, during his first interview with his wife, state distinctly the grounds of his hesitation,—and, subsequently, after his delivery of the soliloquy, "If it were done," would he *affect* sentiments of justice and

of honour which he cannot feel, and which in his own mind he must be thoroughly convinced that lady Macbeth will only listen to with scorn, as motives to deter them from the commission of the murder? According to the reviewer's notion of his character, Macbeth is in reality remorseless; he does not at any time relent from the purpose he has formed, but is merely deficient in the nerve requisite for its execution. Lady Macbeth herself is prepared to carry into effect her murderous intention. Macbeth, weak, and irresolute, looks to and relies upon his wife to sustain him in the existing emergency. Is it, then, conceivable, that he would urge, as arguments for laying aside his purpose, considerations of loyalty and honour, with which his own remorseless nature, and the resolute character of his lady, can have no possible sympathy, and that he would refrain from urging his own strongly-felt doubts as to the success of their undertaking, which, although the suggestions of a cowardly imagination, are, nevertheless, plausible, and worthy of a fair consideration, because "the attempt without the deed confounds them?"

If, notwithstanding his ambition, influenced by his fears, he would forego his purpose, Lady Macbeth's resolute nature—we repeat—must inevitably fail to recognize, in the sentiments delivered by her husband, motives to deter them from Duncan's assassination. If, upon the other hand, Macbeth would not willingly abandon the prospect of being King, and yet, powerfully impressed with the danger of the undertaking, fears to adopt the means necessary for its accomplishment, by what motive is he withheld from at once stating to his wife that it is *because* he dreads the possibility of failure that he dares "proceed no further in the business?" Lady Macbeth, it is evident, which the reviewer admits, is thoroughly persuaded that, however desirous her husband may be of obtaining the crown, he, nevertheless, has certain *moral scruples* in regard to *the means* of obtaining it ;—she *believes* that it is the "milk of human kindness" in his nature which wrings from him the sentiments he utters ; and, while utterly despising him for expressing those sentiments, she scorns to enter upon any argument with her husband in regard to them ;

but, keeping steadily in view *the single fact* of his *irresolution*, proceeds to taunt him with his cowardice, weakness, and inconsistency. "If you entertain these conscientious doubts and fears, why did you ever resolve upon Duncan's assassination,—why did you ever aspire to the possession of a throne?" Such appears to be the light in which the lady places the matter before Macbeth, whom she goads into the commission of the murder; not, we say, by any attempt to remove by argument the scruples he entertains, but rather by the fierce invectives with which she meets them:—by imputing to her husband, in the first place, an utter imbecility of mind:—

" Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?

And wakes it now, to look so green and pale

At what it did so freely? From this time,

Such I account thy love."

And then, by the imputation of moral cowardice—

" Art thou afar'd

To be the same in thine own act and valour,

As thou art in desire?"

While, finally, by a most terrible declaration she positively shames the weak nature of her husband out of any further utterance of the objections he has attempted to express :—

“ I have given suck ; and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me :  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this.”

Was it, then, for the express purpose of *provoking* the bitter expression of his wife's contempt, that Macbeth put forward, as motives which deterred him from the assassination, considerations of loyalty and honesty which did not in reality influence him in the slightest degree ?

If it was really owing to his conscientious scruples that Macbeth announced his determination of “ proceeding no further in the business,” we can easily understand that the dread of encountering his wife's sarcasm—strong as might have been its influence on his mind—might, yet, have proved less powerful than the feelings of remorse and horror of his contem-

plated crime. But, that he *should* coldly *affect* to be under the influence of *sentiments*, the utterance of which, he *must* have been perfectly aware, could not but *elicit* from his wife the expression of her scorn, is inconceivable.

The absurdity of supposing that when Macbeth utters such passages as these,—

“ He hath honoured me of late ;”

“ I dare do all that may become a man :

Who dares do more is none—”

he is not in reality actuated by these sentiments, but merely by a dread of the odium and retribution which would be the consequence of failure, is the more apparent when we consider that, while he could have had no motive, as we have just observed, for enunciating sentiments foreign to his nature, on the other hand, there was absolutely nothing to prevent, upon Macbeth's part, the most explicit statement of his fears, seeing that he no sooner utters the simple exclamation “ If we should fail !” than Lady Macbeth's whole tone becomes immediately changed, —her reproaches cease, and she applies herself



to the single point of proving to her husband the improbability of failure.

“ When Duncan is asleep,  
 (Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey  
 Soundly invite him,) his two chamberlains  
 Will I with wine and wassail so convince,  
 That memory, the warder of the brain,  
 Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
 A limbeck only,” &c.

The most entire openness is at once apparent between the murderer and his accomplice, who proceed to discuss the means of providing against the chances of failure in the act itself, and of detection after its accomplishment. The true, because obvious reason, why the murderer refrains from making any reference until towards the close of his last interview with Lady Macbeth, to the possibility of failure, is, that selfish considerations are not the cause of his hesitation. It is a generous aversion to the crime that makes him pause. In the soliloquy commencing, “ If it were done,” he has realised to himself the enormous baseness involved in the murder of his sovereign,

and it is under a sense of its infamy that he asserts,—

“I dare do all that may become a man,  
Who dares do more is none.”

His subsequent determination to perpetrate the murder is no proof that his previous scruples were not sincere ones. Having experienced the futility of his appeal to the humanity of Lady Macbeth—finding her dead to pity and remorse—feeling that she has inexorably determined upon the accomplishment of her purpose—unable to withstand the blasting influence of the superior strength and firmness of her character—stung by her sarcasm—Macbeth ceases to urge the claims of justice and humanity.

“No longer daring to hint at compunction,” the reviewer observes, “Macbeth now falls back upon his last remaining ground of objection, the possibility that their attempt may not succeed—

“If we should fail!”

This is quite true; and since the possibility that their attempt may not succeed is his *last* remaining ground of objection, the *principal* source of

his scruples could not have lain in his selfish fears. It is only when under the influence of his wife's eloquence he no longer dares express his real scruples, that he suggests the possibility of failure.

The expression of apprehension—the only one that escapes his lips—contained in the simple words, “If we should fail,” Macbeth *then* uses as a kind of cloak or excuse for the utterance of sentiments which the indomitable energy of his wife has forbidden him to act upon. He pretends, *then*, that he is deterred from the commission of assassination by *other motives and considerations* than those *which in reality had influenced him*. Notwithstanding that he thus starts a new ground of objection to the scheme of assassination, and immediately afterwards appears convinced of the possibility of overcoming the difficulty, when, in admiration of the energetic nature of his inflexible accomplice who has endeavoured to point out the improbability of failure, he exclaims,

“Bring forth men-children only,  
For thy undaunted mettle should compose  
Nothing but males;”

and, presently, catching at his wife's suggestion asks :

“ Will it not be received,  
When we have marked with blood those sleepy two  
Of his own chamber, and used their very daggers,  
That they have done 't ?”

it evidently is not, as the reviewer states, because he has received the previous passage—

“ When in swinish sleep  
Their drenched natures lie, as in a death,  
What cannot you and I perform upon  
The unguarded Duncan ? What not put upon  
His spongy officers ; who shall bear the guilt  
Of our great quell ? ”

“ As a sort of blessed revelation, showing him the way out of his horrible perplexity,”—it is not, because the grounds for his selfish apprehensions have been removed, that he finally resolves upon the assassination of his sovereign, but because, laughed out of his conscientious scruples, for the moment he has stifled his unfeigned repugnance to the commission of the murder. Were

it otherwise—if Macbeth, while suggesting the possibility of failure, was really influenced by selfish apprehensions of the odium and retribution which the crime might bring upon him, the mere expedient of “marking with blood the sleepy two of Duncan’s chamber, and using their very daggers,” would scarcely have sufficed to have dissipated his fears.

The reviewer states, that Lady Macbeth’s quiet reply to her husband’s objection that their attempt may fail. “We fail!” “is every way most characteristic of the speaker, — expressing that moral firmness in herself which made her quite prepared to endure the consequences of failure; and, at the same time, conveying the most decisive rebuke of such moral cowardice in her husband as could make him recede from a purpose merely on account of the possibility of defeat — a possibility which, up to the very completion of their design, seems never to have been absent from her own mind, although she finds it necessary to banish it from that of her husband.”

We need not again discuss the point we have

been just considering. If what we have already observed be true, it must be evident that Macbeth did not recede from his design, merely on account of the possibility of defeat. The remark that Lady Macbeth's reply "conveys the most decisive rebuke of such moral cowardice in her husband, as could make him recede from a purpose *merely* on account of the possibility of defeat," is inconsistent with the reviewer's own admission, that she all along believed that her husband's repugnance to commit the murder was a virtuous repugnance—a repugnance proceeding from the milk of human kindness in his nature; for, it is evident, that with such an impression of his character, Lady Macbeth would not have supposed the mere dread of failure to have been the sole, or indeed, the chief motive of his hesitation.

Further, it is undeniable, we think, notwithstanding the strong sarcastic emphasis which Lady Macbeth, as she is represented on the stage at the present day, is usually made to place upon the words "We fail!" that a very decided change becomes apparent in the tone adopted

by the lady towards her husband, so soon as he desists from urging his moral objections to the murder.

The remark that the possibility of defeat, "up to the very completion of their design, seems never to have been absent from her own mind," we are again, we confess, at a loss to reconcile with the notion that Lady Macbeth would rebuke with so much bitterness in another the expression of apprehensions similar to the very fears which she experienced herself.

The reviewer in another place is fairly liable to the charge of inconsistency. Alluding to Macbeth's conduct after he has assassinated Duncan, he remarks—

"So soon as Macbeth finds himself, for the moment, *safe from discovery*, he lapses into his old habit of ill-timed rumination upon the nature and circumstances of the act he has just committed, which touch his fearful fancy vividly enough, but his heart not at all."

Presently he observes :—

"Through all the rest of this scene he remains lost in his profitless rumination, leaving the

business but half executed, on the completion of which depends, not only the attainment of the object of his ambition, but even his escape from detection as the murderer."

What are we to understand from these passages? that the murderer did or did not consider himself in safety while indulging in his poetical ruminations?

If Macbeth could not have considered himself safe from discovery—and he could not possibly have done so—towards the conclusion of the scene occurring immediately after his commission of the murder, neither at its commencement—if, as the reviewer states, he was perpetually looking to his own selfish interests—could he, in reality, have considered his position sufficiently secure as to admit of his indulging without peril to himself in ill-timed ruminations upon the nature and circumstances of the act he had just committed. The fact, then, that *at the risk of his detection as the murderer*, he *does* remain lost in his profitless rumination, is inconsistent with the supposition that his actions were uniformly regulated by selfish considerations.



If selfish considerations invariably influenced Macbeth, he surely would not have entered on so profitless a train of meditation until all chances of discovery had been removed, (which, as the business was but half executed, was evidently not the case,) for it is inconceivable that a man as nervously apprehensive of the odium and retribution which might follow the perpetration of his crime, as the reviewer has represented Macbeth to have been, would, for the sake of "the grave amusement afforded to his imagination of taking a poetical view of his own atrocity," have run the risk of being discovered as the murderer.

The reviewer next proceeds to speak of the atrocious conduct of which Macbeth is guilty, after he has assassinated Duncan, in murdering the two sleeping attendants, as well as in assassinating Banquo,—acts which he perpetrates without pausing to deliver any of those highly poetical sentiments in which he had indulged both before and immediately after the murder of his sovereign. The reviewer observes :—"The following scene shows us Macbeth when his paroxysm ensuing upon the act of murder has

quite spent itself, and he has become quite himself again—that is, the cold-blooded, cowardly, and treacherous assassin. Let any one who may have been disposed, with most of the critics, to believe that Shakspeare has delineated Macbeth as a character originally remorseful, will consider that speech of most elaborate, refined, and cold-blooded hypocrisy in which, so speedily after his poetical whinings over his own atrocity in murdering Duncan, he alleges his motives for killing the two sleeping attendants.

*Macbeth.* O, yet I do repent me of my fury,  
That I did kill them.

*Macduff.* Wherefore did you so? -

*Macb.* Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,  
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man :'  
&c. &c.

“No ; a character like this, we cannot too often repeat, is one purely of the most cowardly selfishness and most remorseless treachery, which all its poetical excitability does but exasperate into the perpetration of more and more extravagant enormities.

“How finely is the progressive development of

such a character set before us in the course of the following act, in all that relates to the assassination of Banquo : . . . . .

. . . . .

mark the intense selfishness implied in the following reflections :—

“ He chid the sisters,

When first they put the name of king upon me,  
And bade them speak to him ; then, prophet-like,  
They hailed him father to a line of kings :  
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,  
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,  
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,  
No son of mine succeeding. If it be so,  
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind ;  
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered ;  
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace  
Only for them ; and mine eternal jewel  
Given to the common enemy of man,  
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings !  
Rather than so, come, fate, into the list,  
And champion me to the utterance !”

“ What a depth, we say, of the blackest selfishness is here disclosed ! It is not enough for Macbeth

to have realized so speedily all the greatness that the Weird Sisters had promised him, by virtue, as he supposes, of preternatural knowledge, unless he can prevent the accomplishment of the prediction which, by virtue of the very same knowledge, they have made in favour of the race of Banquo after Macbeth's own time. His desire to prevent even this remote participation of Banquo's issue in the greatness for which he thinks himself partly indebted to this "metaphysical aid," is so infatuatedly headstrong as to make him absolutely, as he says, enter the lists against fate."

Now, admitting the intense selfishness which the above reflections disclose, and granting—what of course it would be absurd to deny—that the act of murdering Duncan's attendants was most infamous, how does either of these admissions, in the slightest degree, affect the question which we have been considering? The reviewer says—"Let any one who may have been disposed, with most of the critics, to believe that Shakspeare has delineated Macbeth as a character originally remorseful, well consider that speech of

most elaborate, refined, and cold-blooded hypocrisy in which, so speedily after his poetical whinings over his own atrocity in murdering Duncan, he alleges his motives for killing the two sleeping attendants."

But if, as we have already seen, in the earlier passages of the drama, we have *not* the representation of an utterly remorseless character, no subsequent act can alter the fact, if so it be, that Macbeth was originally remorseful. Because, *after* his perpetration of a crime to which he has been impelled as much by the instigation of others as by the evil impulses in his own breast, Macbeth commits another dastardly and inhuman act, it cannot follow that, *before* he had become guilty of any crime, sensible of the claims of kindred and of the ties of gratitude and hospitality, he may not have experienced natural feelings of compunction while vehemently struggling with the temptations by which he was assailed. Duncan's assassination is the one great crime to the commission of which, as we have seen, Macbeth feels a strong moral repugnance, while painting to himself the enormity of the guilt he

would incur in the perpetration of so cowardly and treacherous an action. When, after a stormy contest with his conscientious scruples, hardened, for a while, to the dictates of every kindlier impulse within him, he has murdered his sovereign, his position is no longer that of a man struggling with temptation; it is the position of one who, however vainly, strives to stifle every remorseful feeling in his nature, and who, having, at length, become the incarnation of his own terrible imaginations, from the realization of which he had so long shrunk back with horror, is resolved, at all hazards, fully to accomplish that for the sake of which he has assassinated Duncan.

We were just now endeavouring to show that Macbeth's soliloquy "If it were done, &c.," is the expression of his conscientious objections to the murder of his sovereign, and that it is because they are so strongly felt by Macbeth that he subsequently urges those objections to his wife with all the eloquence he is master of. Although, when shamed out of the further expression of his moral scruples by the contemptuous bearing of his lady, no longer daring to whisper

of compunction, for the first time he alludes to the possibility of failure, we maintained that mere selfish apprehension was not the real cause of his reluctance to carry into execution his murderous design; for we argued that, if the possibility of failure had at that time been uppermost in his thoughts, the mere expedient of marking with blood the sleepy two of Duncan's chamber, and using their very daggers, could not possibly have been sufficient to have quieted his fears. Now we see Macbeth's own conviction of the insufficiency of that expedient in the conduct which he afterwards pursues. The means, however, subsequently adopted with the view of avoiding the possibility of discovery are not thought of until after the murder has been perpetrated, which would hardly have been the case if his repugnance to Duncan's assassination had been owing solely to his apprehensions of failure. That those means were absolutely necessary for securing the object which Macbeth and his wife wished for, it is not necessary, as, indeed, it would be impossible to show. That the chances of detection, however, were greatly lessened by the murder of

the attendants, cannot be denied. The whole circumstances of the assassination could not, of course, have been enveloped in so complete a mystery as they were, if the attendants had been in a condition with their own lips to have maintained their innocence.

The commission, then, of this last enormity is the corollary, so to speak, of the cold-blooded murder which had preceded it; and we can hardly wonder, when, for the attainment of an ambitious object, Macbeth has committed a signally base and treacherous action, at his subsequent commission of a crime which the *commencement* of an iniquitous course, as it appeared to him, had rendered necessary, not merely for his own security, but for the sake of that very object for which the murder of his sovereign had been determined on.

Somewhat similar are the considerations suggested by Banquo's assassination, as well as by the additional atrocities committed by Macbeth.

Because, after the murder of his sovereign, owing to the very different position in which



Macbeth finds himself placed, he is tempted to perpetrate further enormities, it by no means *follows* that Shakspeare has not delineated the character of his hero as originally remorseful. As soon as Macbeth, by means abhorrent to his natural disposition, has obtained possession of the throne, he is assailed by all sorts of apprehensions for its security. "His fears in Banquo stick deep," and although he says—

"There is none but he  
Whose being I do fear;"

it soon becomes evident that he fears Macduff as much as Banquo. All this, however, to use Mr. Knight's expression, "is the natural course of guilt."

"As Macbeth," Mr. Knight observes, "recedes from his original nature under the influence of his fears and his superstitions, he becomes, of necessity, a lower creature. It is the natural course of guilt. The brave Macbeth changes to a counterfeiter of passions, a hypocrite—

'O, yet I do repent me of my fury,  
That I did kill them!'

He descends not only to the hire of murderers; but to the slander of his friend to stimulate their revenge."

As Banquo was present at his first interview with the Weird Sisters Macbeth has ample reason to dread the suspicions of that chieftain in regard to the means by which he has obtained possession of the crown.

"Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,  
As the weird women promised; and I fear  
Thou play'st most foully for't; yet it was said  
It should not stand in thy posterity;  
But that myself should be the root, and father  
Of many kings."

Such are Banquo's own comments on the fulfilment of the prediction of which he speaks.

Again, by his fears Macbeth is driven to seek the destruction of the Thane of Fife; while the rage and disappointment which he feels upon receiving the tidings of that chieftain's flight, impel him to

"Seize upon Fife; give to the edge o' the sword  
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls  
That trace him in his line;"—

an act of cold-blooded cruelty which, by rendering him an object of still greater detestation to his subjects, is calculated to defeat those very purposes, viz., the retention of his throne and his own personal security, for the sake of which he had determined on the assassination of his foe.

It may or it may not be admissible of proof that Macbeth was utterly unscrupulous at the opening of the Drama. The actions, however, which we have just mentioned, do not prove that he was so, although they render it abundantly evident that he was totally remorseless at the time of their performance. Now, if from the earlier passages of the Drama it can be shown that Macbeth originally was not wanting in the kindlier feelings of humanity, then, in the absence,—previous to the execution of those sanguinary purposes which he subsequently forms,—of all those compunctious visitings which had been apparent in Macbeth while meditating the murder of his Sovereign, we shall merely recognise “the natural course of guilt”—we shall see

the effect upon his character of his previous crime.

But, let us consider the conduct which Macbeth pursues so soon as he has determined upon Banquo's assassination. He takes the whole responsibility of this crime upon himself. He does not make his wife an accomplice in the murder. But if, previous to Duncan's assassination, the hesitation he evinced arose from moral cowardice, should we not expect that the same cause which made him waver in his design of assassinating Duncan, would, also, have made him falter in his purpose of murdering Banquo; since, however much the perpetration of his first crime may have had the effect of rendering his character more hardened, it would not have lessened his moral cowardice. If, then, previous to assassinating Duncan, Macbeth, as the reviewer states, was driven by his cowardice to lean for support on the moral resolution of his wife, how is it that he is not driven to lean on precisely the same support before he can make up his mind to perpetrate an additional murder? The reviewer appears to have anticipated this question, for he

remarks that Macbeth does not dare to communicate to his wife, in plain terms, his present scheme "lest she should chide the fears that prompt him to this new and gratuitous enormity, by virtue of the very same spirit that had made her combat those which had withheld him from the one great crime which she had deemed necessary to his elevation." But this answer is wholly unsatisfactory. Admitting, for the sake of argument, that the reviewer is correct in his estimate of Lady Macbeth's character,—admitting that she was accessible to remorse, and that, labouring under "compunctious visitings," she would have chided in her husband the fears prompting him to this new enormity, she could not possibly have appeared to Macbeth under any other aspect than that of the cold-blooded unscrupulous assassin; and, because in her conduct towards himself—for, whenever she rebukes her husband, it is for displaying those symptoms of remorse which he finds it impossible wholly to suppress—she has never furnished him with the slightest reason for supposing that she even knew what compunction meant, he could not possibly

have apprehended that she would chide him for meditating the commission of an additional crime.

When the idea of murdering Duncan first occurred to Macbeth and his lady, their mutual acquiescence in the scheme of assassination was absolutely necessary to the success of the enterprise they had in view. But Lady Macbeth's knowledge of her husband's purpose in regard to Banquo's assassination, was *not necessary* to the success of the design he contemplated; and therefore it is that he leaves the lady in ignorance of his intention, observing—

“Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,  
Till thou applaud the deed.”

Looking, then, at his forbearance on this occasion, we are inclined to agree with the critics “who have represented this passage as spoken by Macbeth out of a magnanimous desire to spare his wife all guilty participation in an act, which, at the same time, he believed would give her satisfaction.”

If Macbeth had been deterred by the dread of

his wife's disapprobation from informing her of his purpose, would not a similar apprehension have withheld him from alluding at all to the design he entertained? In the passage above quoted it is made perfectly evident to Lady Macbeth that her husband contemplates the performance of a deed which he believes will meet with her approval. In the preceding passage—

“ Ere the bat hath flown

His cloistered flight,—ere to black Hecate's summons,  
The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,  
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done  
A deed of dreadful note ! ”

the fearful character of the act he contemplates is pointedly alluded to ; while she can hardly doubt that it has reference to Banquo and to Fleance, after his emphatic declaration in allusion to them, “ *They are assailable.* ” Of the means by which the meditated crime is to be accomplished, Lady Macbeth is ignorant ; her knowledge, however, is amply sufficient to induce her to chide her husband for contemplating the commission of a fresh enormity, did her nature admit of her adopting such a proceeding.

But now, on the other hand, it may be argued, if Macbeth really desired to spare his wife all participation in the murder, *how was it* that he made any reference at all to the deed he meditated? Seeing that he makes those allusions to the coming of some terrible event, may it not, after all, be as the reviewer has stated, viz. that he only refrains from distinctly avowing the purpose he has formed, because, after cautiously feeling his way to a certain extent, he finds his wife indisposed to concur in his present project? Macbeth's allusion, however, to the object he has in view, taking into consideration the circumstances under which it is made, is by no means inconsistent with the supposition that he intended to await the issue of his enterprise before imparting its nature to Lady Macbeth. Willing alone to incur the responsibility of this further crime, the murderer has no communication with the lady until he has determined on the method of assassination, and given the fullest instructions to those who are to carry his design into execution. When his plans are formed, and while they are in a state of



considerable forwardness, that interview with his wife occurs, in which he alludes to the advent of some terrible occurrence. It is not, however, Macbeth who seeks the interview alluded to ; it is through the lady's own contrivance that it takes place.

“ ACT 3rd.—SCENE 2nd.

*Enter Lady Macbeth and a Servant.*

*Lady M.* Is Banquo gone from Court ?

*Servt.* Ay, madam, but returns again to-night.

*Lady M.* Say to the king, I would attend his leisure  
For a few words.

*Servt.* Madam, I will. *Exit.*”

Macbeth enters almost immediately afterwards.

Thus it is Lady Macbeth who breaks upon her husband's solitude for the purpose of persuading him to “sleek o'er his rugged looks,” and be “bright and jovial among his guests” that night. “Remembering,” to use the reviewer's own words, “the thorough union between this pair in affection as well as in ambition,” it can hardly be matter of surprise, under such circumstances, that

Macbeth, in answer to his wife's questionings, should declare the cause of his disquietude, and hint, by no means vaguely, at the method by which he intended to restore tranquillity to his mind. Had he, however, really desired to make his wife an accomplice in the murder, he would himself have demanded the interview in question, in order, previous to the execution of his plans, to explain to her their nature, and demand her concurrence in the enterprise.

If then, in refraining from communicating to Lady Macbeth the design he had formed of murdering Banquo, he was really anxious to spare her all participation in the act he contemplated, the degree of consideration which he thus evinces for his wife, shows, that the murderer was not utterly destitute of the kindlier feelings of humanity. It is thus that, amidst all his crimes, we occasionally see the evidence of a better nature, and hence it is that our sympathy for Macbeth arises. Of course, after what we have stated of the hero's character, we shall not, like the reviewer, consider such passages as the following

as "mere poetical whining," but as genuine expressions of Macbeth's own consciousness of what he once had been, and of what through crime he had become. We recognize in those passages the traces of an originally generous and noble mind.

"I have lived long enough: my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf:  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,  
Curses not loud, but deep, &c."

"I have almost forgot the taste of fears:  
The time has been, my senses would have cooled  
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir  
As life were in't; I have supp'd full with horrors;  
Direness, familiar to my slaught'rous thoughts,  
Cannot once start me."

Taking this view of Macbeth's nature, we shall hardly agree with the reviewer who regards Lady Macbeth as a less unscrupulous and remorseless personage than her husband. "It has been customary," he says, "to talk of Lady Macbeth as of a woman in whom the love of

power for its own sake not only predominates over, but almost excludes every human affection, every sympathetic feeling. But the more closely the dramatic development of this character is examined, the more fallacious, we believe, this view of the matter will be found. Had Shakspeare intended so to represent her, he would probably have made her the first contriver of the assassination scheme."

We have shown that Lady Macbeth, although she did not first suggest, did yet in distinct terms first propose to her husband the scheme of assassination; and she may fairly be described as its first contriver, inasmuch as she first pointed out the means by which it might be accomplished. Nevertheless, we do not think that Shakspeare intended to represent the lady as totally devoid of human affection; for we think with the reviewer, as we have before said, that there was "a thorough union between her and her husband in affection as well as in ambition."

In the prosecution, however, of her purposes, she certainly appears to us to have been *remorseless*. We must refer the reader to that portion

of the article in which the writer endeavours to show that Lady Macbeth was accessible to remorse. We can only cite a portion of his observations.

“Free from all the apprehensions conjured up by an irritable fancy—from all the ‘horrible imaginings’ that beset Macbeth; her promptness of decision and fixedness of will are proportioned to her intensity of desire; so that, although he has been the first contriver of the scheme, she has been the first to resolve immovably that it shall be carried into effect. From this moment the position of Macbeth’s mind, as regards his own design, is entirely changed. His freedom of action ceases, and her will becomes *a fate* to him. He cannot help himself; she swears him to the deed:

‘Had I so sworn,

As you have done to this!’

He could have broken his promise to himself again and again, but he cannot break that oath to her, the keeping of which, she well knows, is but the fulfilment of his own increasing desire.

Still, fearing that his nature will shrink at the moment of execution, she determines to commit the murder with her own hand. Hence her invocation to the 'spirits that tend on mortal thoughts' to 'unsex her,' and hence that part of her reply to Macbeth's announcement of Duncan's visit;—

' He that's coming  
Must be provided for; and you shall put  
This night's great business into my despatch;  
Which shall to all our nights and days to come  
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.  
————— only look up clear;  
To alter favour ever is to fear:  
*Leave all the rest to me.*

Yet, notwithstanding her invocation to the spirits of murder to fill her 'from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty;'—notwithstanding her assurance to Macbeth—

' I have given suck; and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:  
&c.'

Yet we find her own hand shrinking at the last moment from the act which she had certainly

sworn to herself to perform,—and that from one of those very ‘compunctious visitings of nature’ which she had so awfully deprecated in herself;—awakened, too, by an image which, however tender, is less pathetic to her woman’s contemplation than the one presented by that extreme case which her last-cited speech supposes :—

‘ Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept, I had done ‘t.’ ”

Upon her conduct after Macbeth has committed the murder, the reviewer remarks as follows :—

“ Finding her husband still ‘lost so poorly in his thoughts,’ quite beyond recovery, she snatches the daggers from his hands, with the famous exclamation,

‘ Infirm of purpose!’

And here, let us observe, is the point, above all others in this wonderful scene, which most strikingly illustrates the twofold contrast subsisting between these two characters. Macbeth having no true remorse, shrinks not at the last moment from perpetrating the murder, though his nervous



agitation will not let him contemplate for an instant the aspect of the murdered. Lady Macbeth, on the contrary, having real remorse, does recoil **at the last moment from the** very act to which she had been using such violent and continued efforts, to work herself up; but, being totally free from her husband's irritability of fancy, can go deliberately to look upon the sanguinary work which her own hand had shrunk from performing."

True it is that it was Lady Macbeth's intention to have perpetrated the murder unaided by her husband. Distrustful of his resolution, while aware of the conscientious scruples by which he was beset, she would, no doubt, have acted on her original determination to commit the murder with her own hand, if it had not been for the resemblance to her father of the sleeping monarch. By such a proceeding,—as far as moral determination could have effected her design—she would have rendered failure impossible. In consequence, however, of that resemblance, she is deterred from taking the business into her own hands, and leaves its performance with the irresolute Macbeth. But, although,



owing to the peculiarity of her husband's nature, failure, under such circumstances, becomes possible, Lady Macbeth does not anticipate the failure, but the successful issue of his murderous attempt. The consequence of her recoiling from the act of assassination is not that the deed remains undone. While, from a natural repugnance to assassinate the man who resembles her father in his sleep, Lady Macbeth shrinks from the actual perpetration of the murder, she is, all the while, calculating on its performance by another. It is utterly ridiculous, therefore, to assert that "Lady Macbeth, having *real remorse*, does recoil at the last moment from the very act to which she had been using such violent and continued efforts to work herself up." Her shrinking from that act is no evidence of remorse. The inference from the fact that she recoils, under the peculiar circumstances, from committing the murder with her own hand is, that she has a certain share of the feelings common to humanity,—that she is not utterly inhuman,—but not that she is remorseful. Had she felt genuine compunction, she would have dissuaded her hus-

band from the perpetration of the crime which she had previously prevailed upon him to assent to. Her conduct during the whole of the assassination-scene is characterized by the most remorseless determination : while the deliberate heartlessness of her proceeding, notwithstanding the light manner in which the reviewer appears disposed to consider it, we look upon as scarcely paralleled for its iniquity, when, for the purpose of securing her own and her husband's safety, she enters the chamber where lies the bleeding witness of her husband's guilt, and, gazing without a shudder on those lifeless features which bear so striking a resemblance to her father's, besmears with blood the faces of the grooms.

According to the reviewer, Macbeth's last action shows that "he died as he had lived, remorseless."

"When Macduff appears before him," he observes, "it is not compunction that draws from him the confession—

'Of all men else I have avoided thee :

But get thee back—my soul is too much charged

With blood of thine already !'

it is, that the words of the preternatural monitor are still ringing in his ear—‘Beware Macduff—beware the Thane of Fife!’ Compelled to fight, he avails himself of the first pause, while he is yet unwounded, to persuade his antagonist of his invulnerability:—

‘Thou losest labour :

I bear a charmed life, which must not yield  
To one of woman born ! ’ ”

So that, as it is not a feeling of remorse which leads Macbeth to warn his antagonist to forbear from the encounter which he seeks, we are to believe that, for the sake merely of an idle boast, a man as cowardly and treacherous as the reviewer has portrayed Macbeth, would forego the gratification immediately within his reach, of seeing the man whom he most hates and fears, lifeless at his feet. What a preposterous supposition !

We think we have now fulfilled the object we proposed to ourselves at the commencement of the foregoing pages, which was to show wherein we differed from the reviewer in his observations on the character of Macbeth.

Duncan’s assassination—the result of circum-



stances in which a weak mind with strong passions and little strength of principle was placed—we regard as the prolific source of Macbeth's subsequent enormities; while the sympathy which we experience for the murderer has its origin in *our knowledge* of those circumstances that first rendered him a criminal; a sympathy which we could not feel were we able to regard him from the very first as an utterly remorseless villain who, of his own free impulses, had plunged headlong into crime.

THE END.

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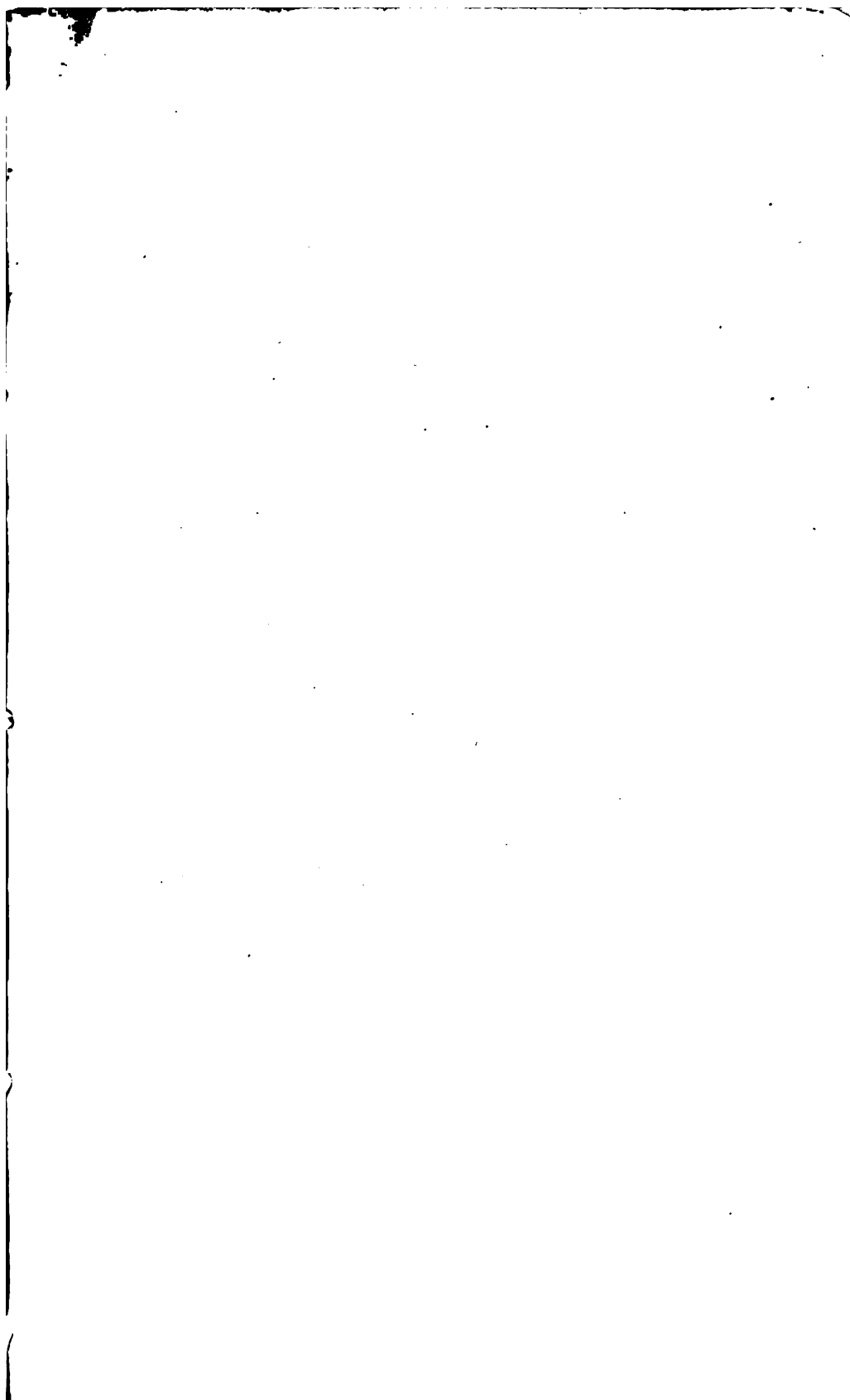
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